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A STRATEGY FOR WINNING THE “WAR ON TERRORISM”

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A STRATEGY FOR WINNING THE “WAR ON TERRORISM”

MEMORANDUM

TO: Al Qaeda Politico-Military Affairs Committee

FROM: Clausewitz & Associates

SUBJECT: A Strategy for Winning the “War on Terrorism”

Just as Al Qaeda employed western transportation and communications infrastructure for its assaults on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the U.S. Congress, so it should employ western concepts of military strategy in carrying on its current struggle. Clausewitz & Associates, America’s premiere strategic consultant, based at the prestigious National Defense University in Washington DC, is honored to have been chosen by Al Qaeda to develop a strategic framework on how Al Qaeda can win the “War on Terrorism,” as it has been characterized by U.S. President George W. Bush. This paper will set forth a military strategy for Al Qaeda to follow, derived chiefly from principles explained by our firm’s founder, Carl Von Clausewitz, in his famous book “On War.”

Define the War Being Waged

As Clausewitz observed, “War should never be thought of as something autonomous, but always as an instrument of policy.”¹ “The political object – the original motive for the war – will,” in turn, “determine both the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires.”² Limited political objectives tend to lead to limited wars, while absolute political

¹ Carl Von Clausewitz, “On War,” (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 88.

² Ibid, 81.

objectives would tend towards absolute or unlimited war. Thus, “The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.”³ What kind of war is currently being waged?

President Bush defines it as a “War on terrorism.” Taken literally this definition is absurd, amounting to a declaration of war on a form of waging war. In essence, however, for the U.S. the “War on terrorism” is a struggle against those who attack the United States targeting non-combatants. It has three basic objectives: (1) destroy Al Qaeda to obtain revenge for the September 11 attacks and to forestall future assaults, (2) overthrow the Taliban government which provides Al Qaeda sanctuary, replacing it with a regime subject to Western influence, and (3) deter other individuals, organizations and states from engaging in similar attacks on the United States.

This is a limited war, using limited means to achieve limited ends. The United States and its allies have isolated the Taliban diplomatically; they are engaged in intelligence and law enforcement cooperation to identify and arrest Al Qaeda operatives and seize its financial assets; they are trying to unite anti-Taliban Afghanistani factions so as to form a government to replace the Taliban regime; they are engaging in bombing attacks and coordinating military activities with the Northern Alliance as part of a campaign aimed at defeating Taliban and Al Qaeda military forces; and they are attempting to target Usama Bin Ladin and other Al Qaeda leaders for elimination or capture through bombing or special forces assaults.

For Al Qaeda, on the other hand, the current conflict is a “Clash of Civilizations.” It is a struggle to rid the Islamic World of Western influences, be they political, economic, social,

³ Ibid.

cultural or religious. This not only involves the excision of the United States and other Western powers from the Islamic world, but also the replacement of all existing governments in the Islamic World that follow secular lines and/or practice politics of accommodation with the U.S. and the West. Their place should be taken by regimes (or ideally a single government) based on Islamic unity and Sharia law.

Given the absolute nature of its political objectives, Al Qaeda must be prepared to engage in an absolute war that knows no limits or constraints, either in physical scope or in the type of tactics used. The asymmetrical balance of military forces, intelligence-gathering capabilities, and wealth, which overwhelmingly favors the United States and its allies, provides a further practical argument for waging absolute war on a global basis. For Al Qaeda to emerge victorious, it must ensure that the ongoing struggle assumes the character of a worldwide clash between the West and the entire Islamic people, rather than continue as a struggle between the West and Al Qaeda's limited number of militants and its Taliban allies.

The Strategic Challenge

According to Clausewitz, "The general concept of strategy...is the use of an engagement for the purpose of the war...The strategist must therefore define an aim for the entire operational side of the war that will be in accordance with its purpose."⁴ Al Qaeda, consequently, should develop a strategy that will prevent the United States from achieving its objectives, unite the Islamic nation, compel the retreat of the U.S. and other Western nations from the Middle East, and impose adherence to Sharia on the Islamic World. We shall address these challenges individually, although, as our analysis will show, both the problems and their solutions are inter-related.

⁴ Ibid, 177.

Foiling U.S. Strategy

Al Qaeda is an idealistic movement. It is based upon an idea, and ideas, unlike people, do not die. As a result, the most the U.S. can hope to achieve in the current conflict is a temporary suppression of Al Qaeda's armed struggle for pan-Islamic unity and Sharia law. As Clausewitz stated, "In war the result is never final.... The defeated state often considers the outcome merely as a transitory evil, for which a remedy may still be found in political conditions at some later date."⁵

On the other hand, while an idea may survive a military defeat, there is no guarantee that it will ever rise from the ashes to its former height, much less triumph in the future. The ideal of pan-Islamic unity under Sharia law, for example, has proved elusive for over 1000 years. It could well remain so for the indefinite future if Al Qaeda and the Taliban are defeated in the ongoing war.

With respect to U.S. efforts to physically destroy Al Qaeda and the Taliban, the latter are waging a defensive war. According to Clausewitz, the purpose of a defensive war is a simple one, "Preservation."⁶ Defensive war is the optimal strategy when one's side has the weaker military force. In such a struggle, the objective is to break the will of the attacking force by demonstrating either the "improbability of victory" and/or "its unacceptable cost."⁷ The recent victory of the Afghan Mujaheddin over the Russians using classic guerrilla tactics is the example that Al Qaeda and the Taliban should follow. This will involve seeking shelter in mountainous

⁵ Ibid, 80.

⁶ Ibid, 357.

⁷ Ibid, 91.

regions, staging hit-and-run attacks, and only participating in engagements when the odds are even or favorable.

By its very nature, “The defensive form of warfare is intrinsically stronger than the offensive.”⁸ This is particularly so when factors such as terrain and weather favor the defense, as is the case in Afghanistan. As Clausewitz observed, “The troops’ national feeling (enthusiasm, fanatical zeal, faith and general temper) is most apparent in mountain warfare where every man, down to the individual soldier, is on his own. For this reason alone mountainous areas constitute the terrain best suited for action by an armed populace.”⁹

Furthermore, “Time which is allowed to pass unused accumulates to the credit of the defender.”¹⁰ This tendency is accentuated by the exigencies of coalition warfare as is being practiced by the U.S., with its pressures for the swift resolution of the conflict, limited collateral damage from bombing, the need to ensure humanitarian assistance to refugees, displaced persons and those lacking food, and the suspension of military operations during Ramadan. Given these pressures for a swift victory, the U.S. may surmount its well-known reluctance to deploy ground troops in a guerrilla environment and sustain the consequent significant casualties.

The longer the war in Afghanistan lasts and the greater the number of U.S. casualties that are incurred, the more likely the possibility that the coalition will fracture and/or the American people will determine, as the Russians did a decade ago, that the price they are being called on to pay in lives and resources is greater than the objective is worth.

⁸ Ibid, 358.

⁹ Ibid, 186.

¹⁰ Ibid, 357.

That said, the commitment of the American public to this war should not be compared to recent retreats in Vietnam or Somalia. In neither of those cases was American involvement in response to an attack on America itself. The closest analogy to September 11, is the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. That attack resulted in Americans' willingness to suffer high casualties in pursuit of Japan's unconditional surrender in World War II. Consequently, convincing Americans that the war is unwinnable and/or that the cost of the war is too high will likely require Al Qaeda to wage much more than a defensive war in Afghanistan; it will also have to launch a worldwide offensive war against the U.S. and its allies.

Achieving Al Qaeda's Goals

A worldwide offensive war will also be necessary to achieve Al Qaeda's goals of Islamic unity and the adoption of Sharia law. While the majority of Muslims may sympathize with Al Qaeda and the Taliban, as well as oppose the U.S. Government's presence and policies in the Middle East and Afghanistan, these sentiments have yet to translate into effective action. The difficulty of accomplishing this transition of sentiment into action, given the accommodationist authoritarian regimes in the Islamic world, is clearly illustrated by the decision of almost all Muslim governments to either support or acquiesce in the U.S. Government's "War on Terrorism." This is just the latest example: the continued application of sanctions on Iraq and the lack of resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli dispute are more long-standing instances of Muslim governments willingness to accommodate their policies to the U.S. rather than pursue the popular will of their people.

The question then becomes how can Al Qaeda mobilize the effective support of the Islamic masses in a worldwide struggle against the U.S. and the West? The answer to this lies in the very nature of war.

Clausewitz defined war as follows: As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity – composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone.”¹¹ Every war involves a different mix of these three factors. For Al Qaeda’s purposes the key element in the current war is the first factor: the “blind natural force” of “primordial violence, hatred and enmity.”

Al Qaeda’s strategy must be aimed at engendering this “primordial violence, hatred and enmity” within the Islamic World against the West, thereby raising a “nation in arms” to expel Western influences and overturn accommodationist Muslim regimes. However, in order to accomplish this, Al Qaeda must first engender these characteristics in the U.S. and the West against the Islamic World.

Western civilization has served as a safety valve for secular and accommodationist Muslim governments. Those Muslims with ambition and talent whose prospects were bleak within their own countries have had the opportunity to emigrate to the West. If they are forced to return to their homelands by an upsurge of anti-Muslim enmity and violence in the West, they will constitute a highly-embittered and capable force for change, open to the appeal of pan-Islamic unity and a return to Sharia law.

While the returning Muslims may lead or support revolutions against the existing regimes, there will always be the danger that they will be subject anew to seduction by Western civilization. Thus, even more important will be the affect of Western anti-Muslim enmity and violence on those with ambition and talent in the emerging generations. If they can see that the

¹¹ Ibid, 89.

West will never accept them, then they will have no choice but to seek to channel their ambitions and talents within the context of pan-Islamic unity and Sharia law thereby bringing about a true renaissance in Islamic culture and faith.

How is this Western anti-Muslim enmity and violence to be formed? The answer is a simple one: through the worldwide practice of terrorism, both generalized and targeted, against all aspects of Western civilization. Conditions of endemic violence must be created so as to cause the citizens of Western countries to distrust, fear and reject all Muslims.

How can such conditions be created? In a generalized fashion this can be done through appeals through Al Qaeda, its operatives and its sympathizers, for all Muslims to engage in random acts of terror and violence: everything from committing arson, to murder, to assaults, to tripping fire alarms in office buildings, to engaging in information technology sabotage. There are up to seven million Muslims in the United States and some 13 million in Western Europe. If one in 100,000 initially heeds this call on a monthly basis it will result in seventy attacks in the U.S. and 130 in Europe. Success will breed emulation, as will repressive tactics by governments, civilians and law enforcement agencies. It would not be unrealistic to expect one in 10,000 Muslims to then respond to this call, resulting in 2000 monthly attacks in the West. Following these successes and additional repression, one can speculate that one in 1000 Muslims will feel emboldened to act, leading to 20,000 monthly incidents, etc... These random and pseudo-spontaneous attacks will also divert the attention of Western intelligence and law enforcement organizations, thereby facilitating the work of Al Qaeda militants carrying out targeted attacks.

These targeted attacks should be designed to have an exponentially greater affect. These attacks may cause massive destruction and loss of life, such as that visited upon the World Trade Center or that which could result from the release of biological agents in a public setting. Or

these attacks could cause disproportionate outrage by targeting influential individuals such as politicians, popular entertainers and sports stars. They can also be aimed at those segments of the population most likely to react violently: for example an attack on a U.S. rural area that voted Republican and has a high percentage of gun ownership.

Al Qaeda's operatives should also make every effort to infiltrate moderate and accommodationist Arab and Islamic social, cultural and religious organizations. This infiltration can be used to influence those organizations to support Al Qaeda and its actions. In addition, this infiltration could be used as "cover" for terrorist operations, thereby bringing popular suspicion and law enforcement action against accommodationist Muslims. For instance, the computers in such a Muslim organization could be used to launch pro-Al Qaeda propaganda or to distribute a computer worm. Such an organization's envelopes could be used to distribute anthrax spores; while its phones can be used for purposefully "suspicious" calls.

Clausewitz addressed the utility of terrorist tactics in the context of popular uprisings, but his insights are applicable to the instant case: "A general uprising...should be nebulous and elusive, its resistance should never materialize as a concrete body, otherwise the enemy can direct sufficient force at its core...On the other hand, there must be some concentration at certain points: the fog must thicken and form a dark and menacing cloud out of which a bolt of lightning may strike at any time."¹² Surprise causes dislocation and acts as a multiplier in generating feelings of outrage and helplessness. Given the technological complexity and openness of Western societies the number of effective targets is endless, and their defensive capabilities are minimal.

¹² Ibid, 481.

The Center of Gravity

In any war, Clausewitz counsels, “One must keep the dominant characteristics of both belligerents in mind. Out of these characteristics a certain center of gravity develops, the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends. That is the point against which all our energies should be directed.”¹³ In the “Clash of Civilizations” the West’s center of gravity is psychological: its will to fight for the continued dominance of Western civilization outside its geographic boundaries. The strategy outlined in this paper is directly designed to undermine the will of the West to continue this struggle by making both the prospect of victory unachievable, and the cost of carrying on the conflict too high in terms of lives lost, resources diverted, and prosperity denied. It will also undermine the West’s own sense of moral superiority by forcing Western civilization to confront its own demons of primordial hatred and enmity as these make a mockery of the West’s pretensions of tolerance, the universalism of Western values, and the West’s respect for other cultures.

Is this strategy certain of success? No, but by creating a vast decentralized mechanism for waging absolute war on a global basis, this strategy increases the probabilities of success and minimizes the possibilities that action by the enemy can cause major damage to our interests. War involves fog and friction, but with thousands of engagements the likelihood of these factors serving as obstacles is minimized.

With respect to war, Clausewitz warned that, “No other human activity is so continuously or universally bound up with chance...In short, absolute, so-called mathematical, factors never find a firm basis in military calculations.”¹⁴ Nonetheless, “With uncertainty in one scale,

¹³ Ibid, 495-96.

¹⁴ Ibid, 85-6.

courage and self-confidence must be thrown into the other to correct the balance. The greater they are, the greater the margin that can be left for accidents.”¹⁵ Considering the commitment demonstrated by Al Qaeda and its militants, their experience in terrorist combat, the creativity and skill of Al Qaeda’s command structure and the coherence of its strategy in relation to its political objectives, and the trinity of war set out by Clausewitz appears to be well balanced indeed.

¹⁵ Ibid, 86.